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ABSTRACT

This paper argues the utility and necessity of debate evidence handbooks as part of high school summer workshops. First, debate evidence handbooks are useful because of the restrictive time element factor in summer workshops. The large number of debate resolutions and their interpretations contained in debate evidence handbooks frees the director of summer workshops from spending vast amounts of time in collecting debate evidence. Second, debate evidence handbooks supplement the library resources of host institutions during the workshop. Third, debate evidence handbooks are intrinsically useful in providing ideas for the formulation of possible case and in serving as positive precipitators of other research. The fact that a variety of material on one topic is contained in one book often has a collective cognitive effect that generates other ideas in the minds of the workshop students. (TS)

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DEBATE HANDBOOKS:

NEEDED ASSETS TO HIGH SCHOOL WORKSHOPS

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In an era of Watergate turmoil, energy crises, rising prices, and other trauma, it has become increasingly difficult to discern the existence of any societal truisms. It used to be fashionable to say that two things in life are certain: death and taxes; however, the developments of cryogenics may soon show us how to cheat the former as surely as the Nixon Administration has shown us how to cheat the latter. Everything is in a flux! One may well expect the Rock of Gibraltar to sink, pulling down the Prudential Insurance Company in its wake. The only stable factor in society seems to be its instability.

However, if one digs down deeply enough it will be discovered that at least one stable truism continues to exist, that debate coaches are inherently (yes, inherently) interpersonally disagreeable. It does not matter whether the coach works at the secondary or college level; it does not matter whether the coach hails from Maine or California. Whatever their academic "bag" or background, debate coaches are going to disagree. We cannot agree on what is "inherency;" we cannot agree on what is good debate proposition; we cannot agree on most anything. If you do not believe this assertion, we invite you to attend a general AFA Business Meeting, wherein you will witness more forensic foreplay than the days of Clay, Calhoun, and Webster.

But, alas, even this truism has its exception. After years of non-laboratory observational research, we have discovered one area of general agreement: the athorrence of debate handbooks. "I'd love to get my hands on old J. Weston," you hear one debate coach say as he sends off his five dollars to Portland; another adds: "Debate handbooks are the epitomy of intellectual laziness and perversion," as he picks up his scissors and paste. This abhorrence is doubled when the issue of the use of handbooks at high school workshops is raised. It seems that while such "evidence pages" are detested in terms of intercollegiate debate; they

are seen as criminal for high school workshops. It was this near-universal damnation that caused the creation of another AFA committee in 1972, the Committee to Evaluate Debate Aids.[1]

Unlike most of our colleagues, we do not add our voices to this burgeoning chorus of opprobrium: we opt for the opposite view--debate evidence handbooks are a useful and often necessary part of high school summer workshops. While granting the fact that there are "bad" handbooks and "bad" people who misuse their contents, we hold that these debate aids are and can be a positive factor in the operation of many high school workshops. This position is supported by three sub-arguments.

First, debate evidence handbooks are useful in combatting the restrictive time element factor in high school workshops. Since the majority of summer workshops run for two weeks,[2] the pressure of time is squarely on the backs of the students. Certainly, it would be advantageous if workshop students could gather all the necessary evidence during the course of the workshop, but it is simply not feasible.

Debate resolutions and their interpretations have become so broad in recent years[3] that an enormous amount of time must be spent in acquiring the evidence necessary to handle the numerous contemporary topical nuances. If workshop students were expected personally to gather each piece of evidence, directors would have to either (a) spend the entirety of the workshop collecting all the necessary evidence, or (b) make gigantic value judgments about what evidence is important and should be collected <u>before the fact</u>.

In either case, we would not have a beneficial situation for any workshop. Workshops would become either nothing more than mere research exercises or would provide analysis about issues and evidence that the workshop director deemed significant. While we have the utmost respect for forensic coaches in general, we doubt that they would function adequately as evidence demi-gods on issues and topics about which they are hardly experts.

Because of the nature of recent debate resolutions and the extreme pressure of time, debate evidence handbooks serve a useful purpose in summer workshops. While these aids should not be the

only research source, they can and probably should be used as an effective complement to other resource materials.

Second, we claim that debate handbooks supplement the library resources of host institutions. While large, comprehensive libraries would be beneficial to participants, such are often not available. Even a casual perusal of the annual JAFA Director of High School Summer Institutes indicates that many smaller colleges have workshops. While we do not wish to suggest that small colleges have weak libraries (and, ipso facto, large colleges have strong libraries), we doubt that the smaller libraries could justify the purchase of law reviews and obscure journals for their academic year students-publications often carefully scrutinized by evidence-hungry debaters.

Workshops in such situations need the supplemental assistance of handbooks. But, in addition, what of students who attend programs where they are unwelcome or barely assisted in the library? What of those students who attend independent workshops with no libraries available? What of those students who have libraries available but are basically ignorant of specialized publications? Should we deny such students access to evidence or to the knowledge of the existence of evidence? No! In all of these situations, handbooks can help solve the problem.

Finally, we contend that debate evidence handbooks are intrinsically useful to provide ideas for the formulation of possible cases and to serve as a positive precipitator of other research. While the claim is often made that these debate aids provide only low-level case analysis, recent research indicates otherwise. The report of the AFA Committee to Evaluate Debate Aids in November, 1973 indicated that, in general, the analysis of the topic in the handbooks surveyed was of respectable calibre.[4]

Regardless of their level of analysis sophistication, however, debate handbooks can spur creative thinking. The simple fact that a variety of material on one topic is bound together may have a collective cognitive effect that will generate other ideas in the minds of the workshop students. Again, while we grant the existence of high intelligence and foresight on the part of workshop directors,

we do not believe that they are such an omniscient group that they can or should conjure up all the potential extrinsic and intrinsic approaches to the topic. Debate handbooks serve as a useful aid in the presentation of material and ideas that can stimulate the student to a broader view of the debate topic. Thus, the student becomes a real part of the learning process.

In addition, the evidence contained within the handbooks can serve as a useful stimulus and guide to further research. Not only are ideas and concepts presented that can spur student research into various areas but also new evidence sources may be suggested in the same way. Handbooks can open new avenues of research to the student, and he will most certainly be better off because of it.

Therefore, because of the pressures of the broad topics and of severly limited time, because of the potential lack of adequate workshop resource materials, and because of the infusion of new case ideas and evidence sources, debate evidence handbooks can prove to be a useful and necessary aid to the successful operation of high school workshops. While we emphasize that these materials should not be the only resources consulted by debate students, we claim that these materials serve a vital complementary function to the other sources available to workshop students.

If the forensics community will take an objective view of these debate aids, and not be prejudiced by years of hand-me-down anti-handbook bias, then the positive attributes of these materials may be clearly seen. We must constantly remember that it is the student who is going to either gain or lose by workshop attendance; debate handbooks can serve as a most positive factor in helping the student get the most for his time and money. And that should be the goals of every workshop.

NOTES

[1]The Committee to Evaluate Debate Aids was created by the American Forensic Association at its annual convention in December, 1972. AFA President Jerry Anderson appointed Professor Ben Chappell of North Texas State University chairman of the committee.

[2]Analysis provided by Professor Jerald Carstens in "Problems Related to the Development of High School Summer Speech Institutes," J. W. Patterson, Chairman. Fifty-Eighth Annual Meeting, Speec Communication Association, 1972.

[3]See, for example, Stan Rives, "More About Squirrels," Journal of the American Forensic Association, IX (Summer, 1972), 291; and David W. Shepard, "Burden of What?" Journal of the American Forensic Association, IX (Winter, 1973), 361-363.

[4]Report of the Committee to Evaluate Debate Aids. Presented at the AFA Business Meeting on November 9, 1973.